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on Thursday, 12 January 1995, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mrs. BADRAN

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Colombia (continued) (CRC/C/15/Add.15)

1. The CHAIRPERSON invited the Committee to consider the issues concerning working children referred to in paragraph 13 of its preliminary observations (CRC/C/15/Add.15). Perhaps the delegation of Colombia could report on any developments that had taken place in that connection.

2. Mrs. OCAMPO DE HERRAN (Colombia) said that the Committee had identified two central concerns. Firstly, the minimum age for employment should be raised from 12 to 14 years. Although no legislative reform of that kind had yet occurred, progress had been made in fostering a political environment amenable to such a reform. The second concern was that the Government should set policies aimed at eliminating child labour. That issue had recently been incorporated in the national development plan, but the Government's current policy focused on discouraging rather than eliminating child labour. Studies had shown that child labour was closely linked to poverty, and especially to working conditions in rural areas. Indeed, only 10 per cent of urban children under the age of 18 worked, as against 40 per cent in the countryside. Those figures suggested that, if it wished to eliminate child labour, the Government would need to eliminate rural poverty - in the short term an unachievable goal.

3. In the effort to discourage child labour, there were two main thrusts. The first was to grant food subsidies for families which kept their children in school. The second, focusing on the elimination of work deemed dangerous to children, targeted child prostitution, which was often a means of generating income for poor families in Colombia, and doing away with child labour in the mines. In the past year, support centres for child mineworkers had been set up in mining areas, and provided food subsidies as well as access to educational opportunities. An important factor was that, since many children working in the mines were the chief sources of support for their families, those programmes also addressed the question of generating alternative forms of family income.

4. Mrs. BELEMBAOGO said that, while poverty was undoubtedly the underlying cause of child labour, policies aimed at discouraging rather than eliminating work by children contravened the terms of the Convention. In her view, idealistic long-term strategies were preferable to unacceptable short-term ones. Strategies might, for example, be developed to create income-generating activities for adults so as to replace money earned by children. Child labour should be prohibited by law; otherwise, children would always be vulnerable to exploitation by employers seeking a cheaper source of labour.

5. Mrs. SANTOS PAIS said that grappling with the problem of child labour in Colombia would be a difficult task, since 80 per cent of children who worked in that country did so in the informal sector. She fully agreed that preventive measures were crucial. Poverty should never be used to justify putting children to work. In using such justification society failed to invest in the future of those children as active participants in society;

education must stand as a priority. Furthermore, the failure to impose criminal sanctions on those who employed children under the age of 12 perpetuated the phenomenon of child labour. What measures had been taken to rectify the problem of a lack of inspectors in Colombia? Again, while she appreciated the serious consideration given to the problem of child prostitution it was not merely hazardous but tantamount to slavery, and it should be banned in all countries.

6. Miss MASON said she rejected the notion that legislation should not be enacted because it could not be enforced. The first step was to enact laws, the second was to marshal the means of enforcing them. Since, however, it appeared that child labour could not be eradicated at once, measures should be taken to protect the children forced to work.

7. Mrs. OCAMPO DE HERRAN (Colombia) said that if the admittedly important goal of eliminating child labour was to be achieved, the collection of information was essential. Recent studies had shown that work by children was diminishing in urban areas. At the same time, however, the number of children at work in the informal sector in rural areas was considerable. Since they were helping with the work on family farms, government intervention was inappropriate. Moreover, in that sector, neither children nor their parents were protected by social security. The elimination of work by children in rural areas would in fact call for the total elimination of poverty. It was important to note that the stated policy of the new Government of Colombia was to set no goals that could not be met.

8. Mr. VELEZ (Colombia) said that, the absence of criminal sanctions against those who violated Colombian child labour laws must be considered in context. If sanctions of that kind were imposed, fathers and mothers in rural areas would be sent to jail. On the other hand, individuals who prostituted minors or provided accommodation for that purpose were liable to prosecution. Penalties consisted of imprisonment for terms of six months to four years, penalties that were too mild for the severity of the offence.

9. Mrs. SANTOS PAIS said that sanctions other than imprisonment could be imposed, such as fines.

10. The CHAIRPERSON said there seemed to be agreement on several points. While child labour was acknowledged to exist, it must not be allowed to continue indefinitely. Children should not provide for their families: they should be provided for. Furthermore, a distinction needed to be drawn between children who helped with farm work and children who worked while their parents simply sat by. Poverty must not be used to justify child labour; the same argument could be used to condone child prostitution. In addition, immediate short-term measures must be taken to protect the rights of the children concerned. Child labour perpetuated poverty and it was essential to break that cycle.

11. She invited the Committee to consider the issues concerning the administration of juvenile justice referred to in paragraph 14 of its preliminary observations (CRC/C/15/Add.15).

12. Mrs. SANTOS PAIS said that she welcomed the principle of the inimputability of the child in Colombia, and took note of the legislation that had been enacted to prohibit the detention and imprisonment of minors. Yet other solutions were needed for the protection and social reintegration of juvenile offenders. While some countries' juvenile criminal justice systems had been replaced by welfare institutions, but that change had not always ensured that the rights of the child were respected. When a child was arrested in Colombia and assigned to a Defensor de Familia, what measures were in force to ensure that, first, the period of detention would be brief, and second, that the family would be informed that the child was being held? What safeguards ensured that the Colombian system was compatible with the human dignity of the child?

13. Mgr. BAMBAREN GASTELUMENDI asked whether criminals in Colombia hired children as thugs, and if so, what criminal sanctions did they incur?

14. Mrs. OCAMPO DE HERRAN (Colombia) said that minors who committed breaches of the criminal law were inimputable. They could not be imprisoned with adults and their punishment, even in cases of homicide, could not exceed three years. Since the adoption of the Minors Code, Colombia had begun to build re-education centres each designed to house and rehabilitate 150 to 200 juvenile offenders. In addition, a university specialization in youth re-education was currently available in Colombia, as a five-year programme administered by the Capuchin Friars.

15. The resocialization process consisted of an initial observation phase, followed by sentencing before a judge. Two options were available: deprivation of liberty, and liberty under supervision, in which case, the child remained with the family and community, obviating the problem of social reintegration. Family support for a juvenile offender was sought in all cases. Educational programmes were also offered to the families of those minors who had committed breaches of criminal law. Unfortunately, such offences were often associated with family neglect or absence, and many parents rejected their role in the rehabilitation of their child and sometimes even preferred to surrender him to the State.

16. While she was satisfied with recent progress made in running national institutes dealing with offenders, a number of shortcomings remained. To begin with there was no court of second instance to which juvenile offenders could appeal against their sentence. That was particularly serious for young children who had committed petty crimes such as theft. A commission had recently been set up with representatives from the judiciary, Ministry of Justice and Colombian Family Welfare Institute with a view to remedying the situation.

17. Another area where improvements were needed was the training of juvenile and family magistrates who had thus far failed to grasp that there were alternatives to deprivation of liberty for young offenders. Staff members of the Colombian Family Welfare Institute who represented minors in court proceedings had made approaches to the judicial authorities so as to alert judges to the problem.

18. The third major problem, referred to by Mgr. Bambaren Gastelumendi, was the situation of youngsters who associated with or were sometimes even kidnapped by criminal organizations and were used to commit serious criminal offences such as political assassinations. Efforts to deal with the problem had been launched on two fronts. In 1994, successful negotiations had been held between government representatives and the Medellin militia to bring an end to such practices. Furthermore, similar efforts were being made as far as drug traffickers and crime syndicates were concerned.

19. Mr. VELEZ (Colombia) said he wished to stress first and foremost that the Office of the Attorney-General was quite separate from the system of administration of juvenile justice. Under the Constitution it was responsible for investigating and prosecuting criminal offences, whereas juveniles could only be charged with minor offences. It was therefore the responsibility of the juvenile courts to decide what steps should be taken for protection and rehabilitation, preferably in open-regime training centres or workshops rather than closed-regime institutions.

20. Minors who were exploited by the world of organized crime because of their special legal status usually came from deprived areas or broken homes. The main attraction for them was the large sums of money at stake, especially for assassinations of leading politicians and public figures, and the amount was often paid directly to their families following their arrest. Under previous legislation, persons who exploited minors for such criminal activities had been liable to prison sentences of up to 15 years. However, that had subsequently been increased to 25 to 40 years.

21. The Office of the Attorney-General was deeply concerned about the situation of minors in general. Detailed studies carried out by its branch offices in Bogota and a number of other cities showed that 84 per cent of juvenile offenders were boys and that they were most likely to be drawn into crime around the age of 17. The studies concluded that juvenile courts and in particular the Minors Police should be given greater investigative powers. The establishment of a special human rights department within the Office of the Attorney-General had been recommended with a view to ensuring greater protection of minors and following up alleged violations together with non-governmental organizations and other international associations.

22. Mrs. SANTOS PAIS said it was rather disturbing that, although minors could not be held criminally responsible under Colombian law, they were in fact treated as such, since they were often liable to long prison sentences. What exactly were the safeguards to ensure that deprivation of liberty was only used as a last resort?

23. While she agreed on the need for judges to be trained differently in order to change current attitudes towards juvenile offenders, she pointed to the importance of dealing with the root causes of the problem. For instance, minors deprived of their liberty must be given adequate protection. Were they properly registered in Colombia, and if so, how? Appropriate measures must be adopted to bring an end to the vicious circle of poverty, delinquency and crime among minors, while avoiding any temptation towards "social cleansing" whereby law enforcement officials reportedly cleared the streets of abandoned

children whom they regarded as potential offenders. She sought assurances that the best interests of children were in fact taken into account and that the perpetrators of violations against them did not enjoy impunity. Further details on how the juvenile justice system actually worked and how it could be improved would therefore be welcome.

24. Mrs. OCAMPO DE HERRAN (Colombia) said she shared the concerns expressed about the apparent contradiction in Colombian law regarding the inimputability ("inimputabilidad") of minors. Perhaps the answer lay in the basic difference between common law and the type of legal systems in Latin American countries such as Colombia based on Roman law, whereby the offender rather than the offence was liable to punishment. Moreover, under Colombian law minors could not be held criminally responsible. That rule could not be challenged, but there remained a number of practical problems to be resolved. For instance, minors who committed serious offences such as murder or kidnapping could not expect impunity. They were held in special institutions for juveniles for a maximum of three years. However, if they had not served their full sentence by the time they reached the age of majority they were automatically transferred to a prison for adults.

25. She agreed with Mrs. Santos País on the need for a proper register concerning minors, more particularly to prevent possible human rights violations by police and security forces from being subsequently denied by the civil authorities. In March 1994 work had commenced on a register of all minors dealt with by the Colombian Family Welfare Institute since 1982, who were divided into two categories: abandoned children and juvenile offenders. Information was provided on their social background, where possible, as well as the details of any administrative or judicial action. There was also a photograph of each child, which was especially useful in identifying and tracing younger children who were often not certain of their origins. It was hoped that the register would be operational by March 1995 and eventually be put on a computer network that would be accessible to the 300 or so family welfare centres throughout the country.

26. Two further positive developments included the fact that, in future, minors would need to make only one statement for official purposes, which would be held good by the various authorities dealing with their case, and the establishment of a special forensic medicine centre for minors in Bogota. At the centre, minors would be offered legal, psychological and social counselling in a caring environment. If the pilot project in Bogota proved successful, it would be extended to other parts of the country.

27. As to how to break the vicious circle of poverty, delinquency and crime, she believed that poverty was not the only motive for crime - cultural attitudes towards children must also be changed. Alongside its programme of economic and social development, the Government of Colombia was striving to protect children's basic human rights and to promote greater tolerance and new values with respect to minors through the appropriate government institutions. The recent campaign in the mass media mentioned earlier, was an illustration of that policy.

28. Mr. VELEZ (Colombia) stressed that the "social cleansing" indulged in by certain members of the police and armed forces was not government policy. The Government none the less recognized that the problem did exist and was currently tackling it in several ways, albeit with some difficulty. First, every effort had been made to create awareness about children's rights through mass media campaigns and business ventures, while a similar programme had been launched by the Ministry of Defence for the police and the armed forces. Secondly, in parallel with the constitutional reform, there had been a reform of the police. Unfortunately, it had to be acknowledged that the reform had not led to the results hoped for by politicians and citizens alike. Furthermore, the commission established to monitor the actions of the national and the military police had been described in the media as a "paper tiger". Nevertheless, legislative efforts to raise awareness continued as a first step towards solving the problem.

29. Impunity was encouraged by the fact that the national and the military police enjoyed the right to be tried by a military court, so that in practice they tended to be both defendant and judge. That privilege was still being enjoyed. A further disincentive to proper conduct lay in the poor wages paid to police. Improvements in that regard should now have begun to attract recruits of better quality, thereby making for a more professional and humane police force that could take pride in its work. Lastly, the Office of the Attorney General had set up a Programme for the Protection of Victims and Witnesses, as a means of combating the public's fear of the consequences of reporting abuses. The programme, modelled to some extent on Italian and United States legislation, was gradually yielding results and promoting civic values.

30. The CHAIRPERSON invited the Committee to consider the issues concerning the educational system referred to in paragraph 15 of its preliminary observations (CRC/C/15/Add.15). Perhaps the delegation of Colombia could report on any developments that had taken place in that connection.

31. Mrs. OCAMPO DE HERRAN (Colombia) said that there had been two important developments with regard to the strengthening of the educational system. First, a Plan for the Universalization of Basic Primary Education had been adopted, to encourage the inhabitants of rural areas to keep their children in school. It provided for different grades to be taught simultaneously in the same school premises thereby achieving savings and enabling more rural children to attend school. Under the Plan, books and material were supplied free of charge to children in rural and urban areas - standard practice elsewhere, but an innovation in Colombia. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, as of 1995 food subsidies were being made available to children in rural areas who continued to attend school.

32. Secondly, with regard to secondary education, a programme of scholarships or subsidies had been introduced for young people in poor urban areas who registered in private schools. The programme was an acknowledgement by the State that it could not afford to continue to increase the number of secondary schools and to pay more teachers' salaries, as well as recognition of the existence of a parallel supply of private educational facilities. It had thus been decided to subsidize attendance in private schools, as a means of increasing coverage.

33. Another innovation concerned the supplementary school day. For the past 15 years or more, as a means of increasing coverage, schools had dispensed only five to six hours' teaching daily to each of two parallel groups. It had been a good way of reaching more children, but the system had gradually led to an increase in juvenile delinquency in urban areas where mothers worked away from the home. Consequently, the General Education Act now obliged the schools to provide a full day's education to all pupils, thereby coordinating pupils' and parents' days so that the former would spend less time at home unsupervised and unoccupied. Pending implementation of that new system over the next 10 years, a system of community youth clubs was being introduced experimentally. The idea was that a community educator (for instance, an unemployed or retired teacher, or the mother of a family) would look after a group of about 10 adolescents in the home during the hours when they were not attending school. Food subsidies and support for artistic, musical and sports activities would be provided. It was hoped that the scheme, which was just beginning, would also help to lower the incidence of juvenile delinquency.

34. Teenage pregnancies, as was the case throughout the world, were on the increase in Colombia, because of changes in sexual behaviour resulting from reduced parental supervision and the influence of the media. The only effective means of prevention was open sex education, including clear information on contraception. An innovation in that area was the Sex Education Programme for all schoolchildren countrywide. Unfortunately, children not attending school were obviously not covered by the programme. Given the extreme difficulty of conducting sex education campaigns through the media, the Government's strategy was to make sure that the largest possible number of children actually attended school, so as to have access to sex education at an early age. Furthermore, the Social Security Act now required the Colombian Family Welfare Institute to allocate 1 per cent (about US$ 1 million) of its annual budget to sex education programmes for the children for whom it was responsible. Special emphasis was placed on sex education for women, for if mothers were educated they would pass on the information to their children. In the current year, the Institute was recruiting experts to provide assistance in that area to some 30,000 abandoned children, children in danger and young offenders who, lacking parents, constituted a high-risk group.

35. On the question of educational campaigns to reduce violence in society and in the family and to combat prejudice on the basis of gender, in his inaugural address the President of the Republic had expressed the political determination to eliminate gender-based discrimination. For the first time that objective had become part of government policy and, as such, it had been introduced by the President at one of the first sessions of the Economic and Social Committee. Under a constitutional mandate, a Standing Committee had been established to assess treatment of women and of ethnic minorities in each area of government policy. The central concern of the present Government was to secure peace and collective reconciliation within society.

36. Mrs. SARDENBERG asked for fuller information about the education of indigenous children. Were there special schools that provided education in indigenous languages? What types of programme existed to cater for that very vulnerable sector of the population?

37. Mrs. OCAMPO DE HERRAN (Colombia) said that a new approach towards the indigenous and black populations was discernible since the recognition in the 1991 Constitution of the concepts of equality and positive discrimination. The black and indigenous populations now elected their own representatives to Congress, a measure which would secure fuller participation and act as a step towards achieving political equality.

38. The Colombian Family Welfare Institute, and the education system generally, had by definition to work with indigenous groups, and faithfully respected their oral traditions. A national prize had recently been awarded to a research project carried out jointly by the Institute, anthropologists, indigenous scholars and leaders of indigenous communities, which had converted components of the oral tradition into written material and primers for use in training pre-school teachers of indigenous populations. There was a programme to eliminate malnutrition among the indigenous populations and to reach food self-sufficiency in the most remote forest areas. The education of those groups was a matter in which the authorities were still learning: one shortcoming was the lack of follow-up in formal education once education for the under-seven age group had been completed. Fuller coordination between the Institute and the Ministry of Education was needed in that regard.

39. The CHAIRPERSON invited the Committee to consider the issues referred to in paragraph 16 of its preliminary observations (CRC/C/15/Add.15). Perhaps the delegation of Colombia could report on any developments that had taken place in that connection.

40. Mrs. OCAMPO DE HERRAN (Colombia) stressed that the President of Colombia was aware of the need to turn the policy of defence of human rights into a fully fledged government policy. Implementation of the policy called for close cooperation with non-governmental and international organizations. The establishment of the Office of Human Rights was a welcome step in that regard. A further intended measure was to establish a unit in the Colombian Family Welfare Institute to liaise with the Office of Human Rights, with the twofold objective of following up all cases involving the murder or abuse of children and young people, and of ensuring exchanges of information with the NGOs. It was worth noting that, under the Programme for the Protection of Victims and Witnesses, the Institute took charge of all cases in which the victim was a minor and that it enjoyed sufficient financial, institutional and human resources, including the services of high-level officials, to deal effectively with those cases. Lastly, a new climate of solidarity and respect for human rights now prevailed and, in a country racked by violence, the Government recognized that children were the most vulnerable sector of the population and that special efforts were needed to ensure they were protected.

41. Mr. VELEZ (Colombia), responding to the concerns expressed regarding measures taken to close the gap between theory and practice, said that more than 100 judgements in favour of children had already been handed down under the new protection arrangements referred to during the presentation of the initial report. Citing one example, he said that in the past it had been customary to deny access to schools to minors whose parents were unable to meet the cost of education. Following protection proceedings brought by one minor, the court had ruled that children were entitled to enjoy the

fundamental right to education regardless of their financial circumstances. That was just one of a large number of cases in which the best interests of the child had been deemed to prevail over the broader interests of citizens.

42. Mrs. OCAMPO DE HERRAN (Colombia) said that additional material, including some detailed statistics, was available in the form of projection slides. It might be useful to have that material translated and circulated to members.

43. Mrs. SANTOS PAIS said that she welcomed the new open attitude of the Colombian delegation, especially its admission of the problems. With such an attitude it would be easier to find speedy solutions. However, a new attitude did not mean that a thorough change had taken place in practice in Colombia. The Committee's original concerns persisted despite the improvement, but she was sure that both the Committee and the Colombian delegation were encouraged by the discussion.

44. Coordination was the first area still requiring improvement, for the spread in the number of children's institutions in Colombia caused serious delays. The best thing would be to have a single mechanism for coordinating all the activities. Such a change would improve, in particular, the targeting of resources and monitoring of progress. The local human rights institutions must also be strengthened so that community, religious and indigenous representatives could be involved in the protection of human rights and in cooperation with NGOs.

45. Training was another vital activity. Given the violence in Colombia, changed attitudes could alone change the situation. That could only be done by means of information and training activities directed in particular at professional groups such as the security forces, the military and the churches. Such an undertaking would also require international technical assistance, especially in the training of law enforcement officials. Training was tied in with the question of promoting awareness of the rights of the child as part of education for peace in Colombia and training activities should take place within the framework of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education.

46. Perhaps the main issue was how to combat the violence in Colombia. An effort must be made to enhance society's appreciation of the role of the judiciary and the rule of law. In particular, a battle must be waged against impunity: human rights violators must be punished and the results of investigations must be publicized. It was equally essential that any violations of civil rights should be dealt with solely by the civil courts.

47. Priority must go to the most disadvantaged children's groups, which meant priority first for the social sector, so that it could protect such groups against any form of ill-treatment or exploitation. In that connection, Colombia should accede to ILO Minimum Age Convention No. 138. Particular attention should be paid to preventing the ill-treatment of children deprived of liberty, in which connection it would be useful to examine the way in which the administration of justice worked in Colombia and how it could be brought into line with the Convention. Consideration should also be given to all possible alternatives to the institutional care of children.

48. Finally, in view of the Colombian Government's commitment to children's rights and human rights in general, it should publicize the report and the discussion and the Committee's conclusions in order to provide a frame of reference for future efforts to improve the situation of children.

49. Mr. KOLOSOV said that he endorsed the comments made by Mrs. Santos Pais. He was puzzled by one point: paragraph 3 of the section of the written replies dealing with the definition of the child stated: "In all cases where the law refers to ability to perform certain legal acts or to requirements for capacity to exercise civil rights, it is understood that reference is being made to persons over the age of 18 years". That seemed to mean that minors had no civil or political rights in Colombia.

50. Much work remained to be done on Colombia's domestic law. Despite the many references to plans and new laws, Colombian legislation was still far from being in line with the Convention. It was also important to implement not only the provisions of the Convention but also Colombia's own laws. Similarly, the results of the new legislation must be identified. For example, the Colombian delegation had not indicated whether the Plan of Action had in fact been implemented in 1994. It did seem that, partly through the efforts of United Nations agencies, adults and children were more aware of the provisions of the Convention, but things were not working well in practice. Aspirations were fine, but something must be achieved in practical terms.

51. Mgr. BAMBAREN GASTELUMENDI said that he too endorsed the comments made by Mrs. Santos País and he shared Mr. Kolosov's concerns. In paragraph 10 of its preliminary observations the Committee emphasized, with regard to the right to survival, the gap between the law and its application. The Colombian delegation had spoken of a new dawn, but the road ahead would be difficult. There were too many economic interests impeding the implementation of the law. One example was the way drug traffickers made use of minors. Children in such situations must be regarded as victims rather than delinquents. Continued determined action would be required in order to improve the situation of children in Colombia.

52. Development of the new attitude referred to by Mrs. Santos País was necessarily slow. The Government must persist in its education for peace and in its efforts to enhance the dignity of the individual. Children themselves should as far as possible act as the defenders of their own rights. In other countries, the formation of children's associations, associations of street children for example, and the establishment of education centres in poor districts had produced results.

53. The Colombian delegation was to be commended for its frankness in recognizing the problems and he urged Colombia to pursue its present course.

54. Mrs. SARDENBERG said she too endorsed the comments already made and wished to stress the very frank way in which the dialogue had been conducted despite the difficulty in identifying the many problems in implementing the Convention. A continuing process was taking place in Colombia. The conditions for progress were present, but Colombia must carry on with its effort, reaffirming its commitment and ensuring consistent action.

55. The Colombian delegation had responded well to the Committee's preliminary observations, but there were still many points on which no information had been provided, for example, on the battle against violence. It was important for Colombia to improve its coordination machinery, and additional efforts were still required to solve the problems raised in paragraphs 6, 7, 9, 10 and 13 of the preliminary observations (CRC/C/15/Add.15). There was a particular need for a system of reliable and comprehensive information which would provide a realistic picture of the situation of vulnerable groups and serve as the basis for policies designed to solve the problems.

56. Mrs. BELEMBAOGO said that she supported what her colleagues had said but thought that there was a need to return to the question of legislative measures. Existing legislation, the Criminal Code in particular, must be further revised to bring it into line with the provisions of the Convention, especially the provisions on children in difficult situations. A particular effort should be made to increase the sense of responsibility of adults, especially parents, and to solve the problem of impunity. She had the impression that civil society was still not giving sufficient support to the Government's endeavours. It would also be useful to establish a system for the collection of data on children's problems and adapt existing programmes and devise future programmes so as to have a real impact on the situation of children.

57. The CHAIRPERSON said it was clear from the concluding remarks that the dialogue had been a positive one. However, although the Colombian delegation had provided additional information, almost all the concerns stated in the preliminary observations remained. The problems had been acknowledged, but had still not been fully addressed. Nevertheless, there were clearly grounds for hoping that further effective action would soon be taken. She thanked the Colombian delegation for its cooperation.

58. Mrs. OCAMPO DE HERRAN (Colombia) said that the Colombian delegation was grateful to the members of the Committee and the representatives of NGOs for the attention they had given to the report and for making useful comments and suggestions. Everyone was now agreed that, although the situation had not changed, the attitude to it had, and there was an awareness that most of Colombia's problems were problems not just of children but of the whole of society. She certainly hoped that the ongoing process would be accelerated.

59. On the point raised by Mr. Kolosov she could confirm that the paragraph in question was meant to refer only to the political rights of persons over the age of 18 years. Under the Constitution and laws of Colombia, children enjoyed all social and economic rights from the moment of conception.

60. There was certainly more than a handful of children receiving help in Colombia. The information given on the slides she had mentioned earlier showed that five and a half million children, some 72 per cent of all minors, were receiving food and education subsidies. The apparent gap between legislation and the actual situation might in fact be due to delays in the production or revision of statistics. Colombia was a country of violence but a country whose Government and society intended to make progress towards a better future.

61. Mr. VELEZ (Colombia) said it must be remembered that many subversive groups committed to violence were still operating in Colombia. As recently as December, for example, a six-year-old girl had been murdered by terrorists. It would be useful for the Committee and NGOs to try to convey to such groups the message that Colombia was now a signatory of many human rights instruments and that those instruments deserved to be respected, especially where the protection of children was concerned. Such an international appeal might well be heeded.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.